

Dear Co-Chairs Harp and Geragosian, and Members of the Appropriations Committee,

My name is Lisa Menillo, MD and I am currently the Co Director for the Hartford Regional Lead Treatment Center. I respectfully submit this testimony to appeal to the legislature to spare proposed cuts to the two Regional Lead Treatment centers in CT. For 16 years our programs have been helping the families of lead-poisoned children, with funding from the Connecticut Department of Public Health. The governor's proposed budget cuts would jeopardize the care we provide to those children, who are at high risk for brain damage, learning disabilities, dropping out of school, a lifetime of low earning power and high social costs.

How many in this room have children, grandchildren or family members under the age of 6? How many live in homes built before 1978? If so, those children are at risk for lead poisoning. Many people erroneously believe lead poisoning is a disease of the past but it is still a problem affecting the children of today. Because of our state's older housing stock, 1.4% of kids under six have elevated lead levels that may be affecting their intelligence and their ability to learn. Poorer families are disproportionately affected, usually because they live in poorly maintained rental units – but lead poisoning crosses all socioeconomic lines.

The two Regional Lead Treatment Centers provide not only medical care, but also developmental evaluation, nutritional counseling, social services referrals and relocation assistance to families of children with high lead levels. The Hartford Regional Lead Treatment Center offers temporary housing in a lead-free building so they can continue to receive medication to rid their bodies of lead, while their homes are being fixed or while they search, with our help, for a safer place to live. Medical costs would increase as longer hospitalizations would be required if the Lead Safe Home was not there. We also provide education in the community and to medical providers about the importance of screening for lead poisoning.

Cuts in funding at this time would be particularly inadvisable considering that Connecticut finally passed a mandatory lead screening law for children – playing catch-up with all the other states in the northeast – that went into effect this year. We are anticipating an increase in referrals to our program as more pediatricians send their patients for lead testing.

Our programs also work closely with local health departments and community groups, such as the HUD funded LAMPP (Lead Action for Medicaid Primary Prevention) project that offers financial assistance to homeowners and landlords who want to make their properties safe for young children. LAMPP has received over \$18 million dollars to repair lead toxic homes and make them safe for future generations. The two treatment centers are the main partners of the LAMPP program.

Cuts to our program will mean inadequate medical and social services for families dealing with a crisis which is likely to have a huge long-term cost, both to individual children and to our society. There will be increased special education costs, increased

hospital costs due to prolonged hospitalizations and communities will struggle with poor housing and the inability to repair this housing. We are talking about a brain toxin, and I urge you to think twice about these little ones who cannot advocate for themselves.

Thank you

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